

## Riches Through Poverty

Proverbs chapter 13 informs us that:

“There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches.” (Prov. 13:7).

An example of those who considered themselves to be rich, yet had nothing is the ecclesia at Laodicea, in the times of John:

“Because **thou sayest, I am rich**, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, **and poor**, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich ...” (Rev. 3:17-18).

Supposing that gain is godliness, these brethren had made a success in the things of this world. However, they were in spiritual poverty without realising it: they were “poor and blind and naked”, hence the advice to purchase “gold tried in the fire” – perfected faith (1 Pet. 1:7). There is a danger that we also can measure ‘success’ in terms of the possession of worldly goods, and physical wealth. Those who gain a particular social status in society are looked up to because of such ‘success’, yet they may be spiritually impoverished, as was the ecclesia at Laodicea. As the saying goes, there are those who are so poor, all they have is money.

By contrast, we read, “there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches” (Prov. 13:7). In this, we have the example of our Lord Jesus Christ himself. He made himself poor for our sakes, yet was made rich – and not only so, but we can become rich through him! Of him it is said in our New Testament reading for the day:

“... ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, **though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor**, that ye, through his poverty **might be rich**” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Here is a paradox: through his poverty, we can be rich. How can this be so? A parallel idea is expressed in Philippians chapter 2:

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, he did not consider equality with God a matter to be grasped, **But made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant**, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, **he humbled himself**, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

Back in Genesis chapter 3, we read of how Eve grasped the forbidden fruit in a desire to be as the Elohim: yet of our Master, it is said that he did not so grasp at such equality. Rather, he emptied himself, or made himself of no reputation, and though he were in the form, or image of Deity, he became a servant, and humbled himself in obedience to Yahweh. He made himself poor.

This passage in Philippians describes Messiah as being both “in the form of God”, and also “in the likeness of men”. In this, we see the twofold aspect to the nature of Christ: he was “... the brightness of his [i.e. Yahweh’s] glory, and the express image of his person...”. But he was also sent “in the

likeness of sinful flesh" to condemn sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3). With both aspects together, we find that he was God "manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). Though he had the exalted status as being the Son of the Living God, he became poor, by making himself of no reputation, taking the status as a servant for our sakes, that we might have life through him.

In the humility of Christ, we have an example to follow:

"Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jno. 3:16)

Making himself poor for our sakes, the Son of the Living God provides an example of one who lovingly laid down his life in service. We also, then, ought to reciprocate that love by devoting our lives to serving the brethren and sisters, in the service of God.

Our Master became poor that we might be rich. Plainly, the riches spoken of do not consist of monetary wealth – that was the mistake that the Laodiceans made. Rather, it is the "more precious" gold tried in the fire: a faith tried and tested through adversity. The Apostle elsewhere describes how we can be enriched by the Lord in another way. So, he described how he gave thanks for the example of the Corinthians:

"I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in everything **ye are enriched by him**, in all utterance and all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you" (1 Cor. 1:4-6).

Here, the enrichment was "in all utterance and knowledge". Colossians 2 also speaks of Christ "in whom are hid all **the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**" (Col. 2:3). One aspect of the riches that are provided for us, therefore, is a wealth of understanding: the treasure house of wisdom. It is only by the application of that wisdom that we can obtain gold tried in the fire, and a wealth of spiritual delights. We must therefore seek wisdom with the same diligence as men pursue money:

"If thou seekest her **as silver**, and searchest for her **as for hid treasures**; then shalt thou understand the fear of Yahweh, and find the knowledge of God. For Yahweh giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" (Prov. 2:4-6).

#### **GIVING - THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST**

The example that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ, is of a single minded devotion to the doing of his Father's Will. He was devoted to giving that which was right, rather than to please himself. So we read that "... even Christ **pleased not himself**; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me" (Rom. 15:3). Again, at Gethsemane in his agony, Messiah said "not my will but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). Even so, we must not be lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God: we must not please ourselves, but be devoted to giving faithful service to our God. Jesus gave his all in order to save us from our sins, and we ought to seek to do likewise.

Speaking of what our Lord and Elder Brother gave, he said:

"... whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and **to give his life** a ransom for many" (Mat. 20:27-28).

Here is the real spirit of service, the Son of the Most High God became a servant in order to lay down his life for his friends – and we must heed that example, and do likewise.

This aspect of the ministry of Christ is brought out again in 1 Corinthians 6, again showing the spiritual lessons that come from a consideration of these things:

“... know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

We are bought with a price, and are no longer our own. We belong to Yahweh, whose Son paid the price of his blood to redeem us from the snares and bondage of King Sin. We therefore must not please ourselves, but the Redeemer who purchased us with the blood of the Slain Lamb. Truly, we are made rich through Messiah giving his all.

The Lord’s Apostle Paul also described how that there are riches available to the Gentiles, but through the Jewish rejection of the Gospel preached:

“Now if the fall of them be the **riches** of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?” (Rom. 11:12).

We are made rich through the fall of Israel, because the opportunity of salvation was extended to the Gentiles: but how much more will be obtained when they are brought again into the covenant relationship with Yahweh? “if the casting away of them be the reconciling with the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead” (Rom. 11:15). We Gentiles embrace the Hope of Israel, and look forward to life out of death when salvation comes to Zion.

We saw earlier how that the ecclesia at Laodicea were rich in material things, but were spiritually impoverished. They were counselled to buy gold tried in the fire, which we saw speaks of a rich faith purified through the fire of affliction. James also speaks of this:

“hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen **the poor of this world rich in faith**, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (Jas. 2:5)

Notice this: in material poverty, there are riches – being “rich in faith”. The calling of the Gospel is not to the wise in this world, but to those regarded as being poor and weak by the world at large:

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But **God hath chosen the foolish things of the world** to confound the wise; and **God hath chosen the weak things of the world** to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.” (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

As we saw earlier, we find from these testimonies that true riches come through poverty. It is the poor of this world, who are rich in faith who are chosen by Yahweh. Messiah became poor, and took upon himself the form and role of a servant, that though his poverty we might become rich. So we read of our Master:

“... Worthy is the Lamb ***that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength and honour, and glory, and blessing.*** And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing and honour and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” (Rev. 5:12-13).

It was because of his humility even unto death, that the Lamb received power and riches etc:

“... being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. ***Wherfore*** God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ...” (Phil. 2:8-10).

Elsewhere we are told that it was for the Joy that was set before him that Jesus was able to endure the shame of the cross (Heb. 12:2). He did not seek the pleasures of this life, but the riches of the Age to come. Likewise, we ought to seek first the Kingdom and Righteousness of Yahweh above everything else, so that we might be exalted with him in due time.

We began by citing Proverbs 13:7:

“there is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches” (Prov. 13:7).

In these words, therefore, we see the way in which our Lord humbled himself to the form of a servant. He did not have a wealth of this world’s goods, but looked forward to the riches of the kingdom to come. Even so, we must seek Wisdom as for hidden treasures, rather than to be rich in the things in this life. And then, we shall be exalted with our Master to share with him the riches of the Kingdom Age. Let us follow his example and be wise unto salvation.

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